110 W. Madison
Tom Baima
(Bayma)
6:30
751-5325

ST. PETER'S CATHOLIC CHURCH
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 29, 1993

TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS

JOHN M. BUCHANAN, PASTOR
FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DEUTERONOMY 4:32-40
COLOSSIANS 1:15-20
MATTHEW 28:16-20

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THAT THERE IS NOTHING SO ~~DANGEROUS~~ FRIGHTENING - AND I BELIEVE HE REALLY MEANT OBNOXIOUS - AS A CALVINIST IN POSSESSION OF THE TRUTH - ~~THAT'S WITH A CAPITAL T OF COURSE!~~ one long

WELL THIS SON OF JOHN CALVIN HAS LEARNED OVER THE YEARS TO BE WARY OF FOLK WHO KNOW THE TRUTH, WITH A CAPITAL T, ABOUT ANYTHING: POLITICAL PARTIES, MUSIC, RELIGION, OR THE BEST BASEBALL TEAM EVER TO TAKE THE FIELD.

~~PROFESSOR KUNG TEACHES THAT TRUTH IS NOT GENERAL BUT EXISTENTIAL, PERSON-AL.~~ I AM WARY OF FOLK WHO KNOW THE TRUTH WITH A CAPITAL T ABOUT POLITICS, BASEBALL AND RELIGION BECAUSE I ALREADY KNOW THE TRUTH: I ALREADY HAVE MY TRUTH ABOUT THESE MATTERS.

Phaleena here

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE TOLD THAT YOUR MOST PRECIOUS TRUTH IS NOT TRUTH AT ALL, BUT ERROR, ILLUSION: THAT THE GOD TO WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN PRAYING, AND FROM WHOM YOU THOUGHT YOU HAD RECEIVED COMFORT, SUSTENANCE, FORGIVENESS AND MEANING IS A FIGMENT OF YOUR OWN IMAGINATION OR A PROJECTION OF YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL INSECURITIES? I WONDER WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE INFORMED ~~THAT~~ beautiful CEREMONIES OF TRANSITION AND PASSAGE THAT HAVE GIVEN LIFE SYMMETRY ARE ACTUALLY MEANINGLESS SUPERSTITIONS? PROFESSOR Hans KUNG WRITES:

Baptism
Confirmation
Marriage
~~Ordination~~ Communion
Eucharist

"CHRISTIANS HAVE TOO LITTLE AWARENESS OF HOW OFTEN, DESPITE ITS ETHIC OF LOVE AND PEACE, CHRISTIANITY IN ITS ACTUAL APPEARANCE AND ACTIVITY, STRIKES THE ADHERENTS OF THE RELIGIONS AS EXCLUSIVE, INTOLERANT AND AGGRESSIVE." [THEOLOGY FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM, P. 238]

a ~~Ala~~ Niagra of Sand

I SUBMIT THAT THE EVANGELISTIC ZEAL WHICH ASSUMES THAT WE HAVE ALL THE TRUTH AND OTHERS HAVE NONE, IS NOT ONLY A UNFORTUNATE WAY TO TRY TO START A CONVERSATION, A ~~RELATIONSHIP~~, BUT IN ACTUALITY, DIMINISHES AND MISREPRESENTS THE ONLY ABSOLUTE, THE ONE GOD AROUND WHOM THE WHOLE ENTERPRISE IS SUPPOSED TO REVOLVE. AND ALL TOO FREQUENTLY, I SUBMIT, THAT IMPERIOUS, BELLIGERENT ASSUMPTION THAT ONE POSSESSES ABSOLUTE TRUTH, IS PRELUDE TO VERY REAL HISTORIC TRAGEDY, PAST AND PRESENT.

THE ISSUE HAS BEEN AROUND A LONG TIME. THE DEUTERONOMY TEXT THIS MORNING CONTAINS THE THEOLOGICAL BREAKTHROUGH TO MONOTHEISM... "THERE IS NO OTHER." DID YOU HEAR IT, ALL THE WAY BACK THERE ON THE EDGE OF RECORDED HISTORY? MOSES IS ADDRESSING THE PEOPLE, RECOUNTING THEIR EGYPT AND EXODUS EXPERIENCE. "TO YOU IT WAS SHOWN, THAT YOU MIGHT KNOW THAT THE LORD IS GOD; THERE IS NO OTHER." THAT'S THE RADICAL WORD THAT COMES TO ISRAEL, THERE IS ONE GOD... THE GREAT GENIUS OF JUDAISM. BUT AS SOON AS THE WORD IS OUT OF MOSES' MOUTH THE ARGUMENT BEGINS. SOME WANT TO PROCEED NARROWLY, CONSERVATELY. "GOD'S ONENESS IS OUR PRIVATE SECRET: OUR GOD IS THE REAL GOD, YOURS IS A FAKE."

OTHERS WANT TO TAKE THE BROAD, LIBERAL ROAD: "THE ONE GOD IS LORD OF THE BABYLONIANS AND PERSIANS TOO, ONLY THEY USE A DIFFERENT VOCABULARY."

AT THEIR BETTER MOMENTS GOD'S PEOPLE KNOW THEY ARE CHOSEN, NOT TO BE GOD'S ONLY CHILDREN, BUT TO SHOW THE WORLD WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE TO LIVE AS GOD'S CHILDREN. TO BE GOD'S CHOSEN IS A RESPONSIBILITY, A BURDEN, AS WELL AS A PRIVILEGE. BUT THERE IS A WONDERFUL FREEDOM TO IT. THE PEOPLE ARE NOT INSTRUCTED TO GO OUT AND MAKE EVERYBODY INTO JEWS. THEIR JOB IS TO LIVE FAITHFULLY AND TURN OVER TO GOD THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE FINAL OUTCOME.

THE ISSUE IS THERE CLEARLY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS AS HE IS CRITICIZED BY THE RELIGIOUS ZEALOTS WHO CANNOT UNDERSTAND WHY HE IS SPENDING SO MUCH TIME WITH THEM: OUTSIDERS, TAX COLLECTORS,

PROSTITUTES, SINNERS. AND, AS YOU KNOW, IT WAS THE ~~TOUGHEST AND FIRST~~ FIRST & TOUGHEST ISSUE FACING THE EARLY CHURCH. WHEN MATTHEW WROTE HIS GOSPEL SEVERAL DECADES AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION, THE FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY WERE ASKING THEMSELVES WHETHER GOD CARED ENOUGH ABOUT GENTILES FOR THEM TO BOTHER TELLING THE STORY OF JESUS IN GENTILE CITIES. OR SHOULD THEY, JEWISH CHRISTIANS, STAY PUT, ENJOY THEIR NEW THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS AND LOOK DOWN THEIR NOSES AT EVERYBODY ELSE?

SO MATTHEW'S GOSPEL CONCLUDES WITH THIS WONDERFUL SCENE... THE RISEN CHRIST IS ON THE MOUNTAIN TOP WITH HIS ~~DISCI~~ FRIENDS - PLES. "GO, TO ALL THE ~~WORLD~~ NATIONS MAKING DISCIPLES." JUST AS THE RADICAL WORD TO ISRAEL WAS THAT THERE IS ONE GOD FOR ALL THE WORLD, SO JESUS TELLS HIS FOLLOWERS THAT THE GOSPEL IS FOR THE WORLD: THE

NEW WORD HERE IS "ALL NATIONS." THE FIRST INTENT IS HIS VERY LAST UTTERANCE, IS TO BROADEN THE FOCUS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS SO THAT THEY WOULD BECOME A PEOPLE FOR THE WHOLE WORLD. - not one race, one nation, one religion.

AND SO INTO THE WORLD HIS FOLLOWERS HAVE GONE, SOMETIMES WITH RESPECT FOR THE PEOPLE TO WHOM THEY HAVE GONE, THEIR TRUTH, THEIR CULTURE, THEIR IDENTITY. AND OFTEN WITH BELLIGERENT IMPERIALISM. WE ALL KNOW THAT STORY. IT HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE AND POLITICALLY CORRECT TO BLAME CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES FOR COLONIALISM AND THE RUIN OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES.

BUT THERE IS MORE TRUTH THAN THAT. HARVARD PROFESSOR ~~LAMIN~~ Lamin SANNEH, A GAMBIAN SCHOLAR CHALLENGES THE POPULAR MISSIONARY BASHING. MISSIONARIES, PROFESSOR SANNEH OBSERVES, WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSLATING SCRIPTURE INTO

1,800 LANGUAGES AND IN THE PROCESS IN-VENTED, FOR THE FIRST TIME, WRITTEN LANGUAGE FOR MANY OF THEM. THAT PROCESS ENHANCED AND PRESERVED INDIGENOUS CULTURES. IT INSTILLED ~~SUCH~~ SELF AWARENESS AND PRIDE AND INSTEAD OF ENABLING POLITICAL OPPRESSION ACTUALLY WAS THE SEED BED OF NATIONALISM THAT SPELLED THE ~~END~~ demise OF COLONIALISM." [CHRISTIAN MISSIONS AND THE WESTERN GUILT COMPLEX, THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, 4/8/87]

THE OLD ISSUE REMAINS AND WE CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE WITH IT - RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVENESS, THE PROPENSITY IN ALL OF US, APPARENTLY TO PORTRAY OUR NEWS AS THE ONLY NEWS, OUR TRUTH AS THE TRUTH WITH A CAPITAL T, THE ABSOLUTE AND ONLY TRUTH.

Romans Text here

THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE TIME IN WHICH WE LIVE THAT WANTS AND NEEDS THE KIND OF ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY RELIGIOUS

EXCLUSIVENESS PROVIDES. CALL IT FUNDAMENTALISM OR FANATICISM, IT HAS TRAGICALLY COME TO DEFINE THE ERA, CROSSING RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES LIKE A VIRAL EPIDEMIC.

WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS IS A THEOLOGY WHICH IS COMMITTED TO ITS TRUTH BUT AT THE SAME TIME, NOT ONLY RESPECTS OTHERS AND CELEBRATES PLURALISM, BUT ALSO ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THERE IS TRUTH IN POSITIONS DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN... THAT TRUTH, AS PROFESSOR KUNG SO ELOQUENTLY PUTS IT, IS EXISTENTIAL, NOT GENERAL.

LISTEN TO HIM ARGUE IT OUT AND WRESTLE WITH IT FOR US.

"I AM A CHRISTIAN BECAUSE I BELIEVE IN THIS CHRIST... AND TRY TO EMULATE HIM FOR THE GUIDE FOR MY PATH. HE IS FOR US, THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE.

Penwick + Sanders

From the misguided woman who shoots a doctor because he provides abortions, to ~~Muslim~~ fanatics who want to blow up the UN to Sikhs who gun down their enemies to the Protestant ~~fanatics~~ radicals who ~~in Belfast~~ announced yesterday that any pub in which the old songs of Ireland are sung is liable to be blown up...

"BUT CHRISTIANS DO NOT BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY. IT'S UNTENABLE TO DEFINE CHRISTIANITY AS THE ABSOLUTE RELIGION. NO RELIGION HAS THE WHOLE TRUTH, ONLY GOD HAS THE WHOLE TRUTH. LESSING WAS RIGHT... ONLY GOD IS THE TRUTH." [OP. CIT., P. 251, 255]

PROTESTANT SCHOLAR JURGEN MOLTMANN HAS WRITTEN RECENTLY AND ELOQUENTLY ABOUT A BROADER AND MORE INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE ENERGY WHICH ANIMATES ALL LIFE AND WHICH IS ALWAYS WORKING TO FURTHER HUMAN COMMUNITY. LISTEN TO PROFESSOR MOLTMANN:

"~~LIFE IS FATHOMLESS, AND IS MORE THAN ANY INDIVIDUAL EXPRESSION OF LIFE.~~ IT IS THESE ~~CREATURE~~ CREATIVE LIVING ENERGIES WHICH WE CALL THE DIVINE SPIRIT, ~~BECAUSE IT TRANSCENDS ALL THE BEINGS IT CREATES, AND EVEN ITS OWN CREATURE ENERGIES~~. WE

CALL IT THE COSMIC SPIRIT, BECAUSE IT IS THE LIFE IN EVERYTHING THAT LIVES. CHINESE CALL IT CHI, GREEKS - EROS, HEBREW - RUACH. BECAUSE GOD IS THE CREATOR, HIS CREATIVE SPIRIT IS THE DYNAMIC OF THE UNIVERSE AND THE POWER THAT CREATES COMMUNITY IN THE WIDENING, DIFFERENTIATING NETWORKS OF THE LIVING."] [THE SPIRIT OF LIFE, P. 22]

Might here →

X TIME

→ ?

SOMETIMES ART HELPS US TO OPEN OUR OWN SPIRITS TO THIS LARGER TRUTH... A RIVER RUINS THROUGH IT, FOR INSTANCE. AT THE END OF THE NOVEL, THE AUTHOR, NORMAN MACLEAN, NOW AN OLD MAN, HIS STORY OVER, HIS FAMILY ALL GONE, STANDS IN HIS BELOVED RIVER, CASTING FOR TROUT, REFLECTING----

Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters !!

How to be honest about one's own truth and yet acknowledge the truth of others. How to be faithful to one's sense of God's mission without denying the humanity of others.

African theologian John Mbiti writes poignantly: "God must have been active among African people as he was among the Jewish people... was he not there in other times and other places such as Mt. Fugi and Mt. Kenya as well as Mt. Sinai?" Mbiti observes the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa and writes: "The God described

(X) How to celebrate + rejoice in one's most precious meaning w/v denigrated the sources from which other deny meaning?

TIME? →

Romans + Kung

Hick

IN THE BIBLE IS NONE OTHER THAN THE GOD WHO IS ALREADY KNOWN IN THE FRAMEWORK OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGIOSITY."

[THEOLOGIANS IN TRANSITION, P. 54]

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT THERE IS ANOTHER WORD EMERGING TODAY OUT OF OUR EXPERIENCE AS CHRISTIANS. | IT IS NOT OUR CREATION. | IT IS THERE FROM THE BEGINNING - IN THE UNIVERSALISM OF ISAIAH, THE WORLD VIEW OF JONAH, MICAH... AND IT IS THERE PARTICULARLY IN THE THEOLOGICAL EVOLUTION OF OUR FIRST MISSIONARY, ST. PAUL.

IN THAT MAGNIFICENT CHRISTOLOGICAL DOXOLOGY IN THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS PAUL WRITES WITH POETIC BREADTH. | GOD'S PURPOSE IN BECOMING INCARNATE IN JESUS THE CHRIST, IS TO HEAL, TO MAKE WHOLE, TO BRING TOGETHER, TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS.

It is there in our Christ on his cross, arms outstretched to embrace a whole world ... | a Christ who was so consumed by God's holy love for the world that he offered his life for its healing.. | a Christ who told stories about a banquet to which all are invited, | about love that transcends race, ethnicity, gender, even religion.

MOLTMANN WRITES ABOUT "THE COMMUNITY OF CREATION, IN WHICH ALL CREATED THINGS EXIST WITH ONE ANOTHER, FOR ONE ANOTHER, AND IN ONE ANOTHER, IS ALSO THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT." [OP. CIT., P. 10]

~~ST.~~ PAUL STRUGGLES TO FIND WORDS BIG ENOUGH. GOD WANTS A CREATION AT PEACE WITH ITSELF. GOD WANTS ALL THINGS TO BE IN COMMUNITY. GOD WANTS TO LOVE ALL THE CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD SO THEY WILL ENJOY LIFE AND LIVE IT TOGETHER IN PEACE AND JUSTICE.

WHAT THEN IS OUR VOCATION, OUR MISSIONARY TASK? SOME WILL SAY THAT THIS ALTERNATIVE WORD IS NOT THE TRUE WORD, THAT TO FOCUS ON THE HEALING AND RECONCILIATION OF THE WHOLE CREATION DENIES OUR REAL MISSION WHICH IS TO MARKET JESUS AGGRESSIVELY AND MAKE CONVERTS, TO SCORE, TO WIN,

TO CONVINCE EVERYBODY TO BECOME PRESBYTERIANS OR ROMAN CATHOLICS OR SOUTHERN BAPTISTS.

MY PROPOSAL IS THAT OUR TASK IS TO GO INTO THE WORLD AND TELL THE STORY OF JESUS... TO TELL ABOUT GOD'S PASSION, [redacted] FOR THE CREATION. OUR TASK IS NOT TO SHOUT LOUDER THAN EVERYBODY ELSE. IT IS TO MAKE CERTAIN WE HAVE DONE OUR BEST TO TELL EVERYBODY ABOUT GOD'S LOVE AND TO LIVE OUT THE JOYFUL, LIBERATING, RECONCILING TRUTH WE HAVE DISCOVERED.

I BELIEVE OUR TASK IS TO TELL ABOUT AND TRY TO LIVE A LOVE SO BIG IT ALREADY EMBRACES ALL NATIONS. I BELIEVE OUR TASK IS TO LET GO OF THE EXCLUSIVENESS, AND THE COMFORT AND SECURITY IT PROVIDES, AND BOLDLY, BRAVELY TRUST THAT ALL THINGS, EVEN HUMAN HISTORY, EVEN THE STORIES OF ALL THE NATIONS, ARE IN THE HANDS OF GOD.

[redacted]

It is an intellectual as well as spiritual challenge to get one's mind in dialogue with an idea that big...

GREGORY OF NYSSA SAID SOMEWHERE: "CONCEPTS CREATE IDOLS... ONLY WONDER UNDERSTANDS."

PROFESSOR KUNG CONCLUDES HIS BOOK ON ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY IN A SIMILAR SPIRIT:

"AS FAR AS THE FUTURE GOES, ONLY ONE THING IS CERTAIN. AT THE END OF BOTH THE HUMAN RACE AND THE [redacted] THE WORLD, BUDDHISM AND HINDUISM WILL NO LONGER BE THERE... NOR ISLAM, JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY... NO RELIGIONS... BUT THE ONE INEXPRESSIBLE, TO WHOM ALL RELIGIONS ARE ORIENTED, WHOM CHRISTIANS WILL ONLY THEN COMPLETELY RECOGNIZE, WHEN THE IMPERFECT GIVES WAY TO THE PERFECT - EVEN AS THEY THEMSELVES ARE RECOGNIZED: THE TRUTH, FACE TO FACE." [P. 255]

OR, AS THE APOSTLE WROTE NEARLY 2,000 YEARS AGO:

HIM

"IN THE FULLNESS OF GOD IS PLEASED TO DWELL, AND THROUGH HIM GOD WAS PLEASED TO RECONCILE TO HIMSELF ALL THINGS." AMEN.